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28 October 1972

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Approved For Release 2003/10/22 : CIA-RDP79T00975A023100010003-1

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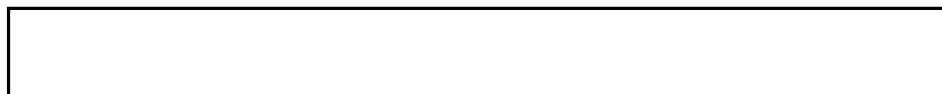


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PANAMA: Torrijos wants meeting with President Nixon
on canal issue.

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PANAMA: GENERAL TORRIJOS WANTS TO MEET WITH PRESIDENT NIXON TO DISCUSS THE CANAL NEGOTIATIONS.

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TORRIJOS IS CONVINCED THAT THE MAJOR TREATY ISSUES CAN BE RESOLVED ONLY THROUGH DIRECT CONVERSATIONS WITH PRESIDENT NIXON. HE THINKS THE MEETING COULD BE HELD AFTER THE NOVEMBER ELECTIONS.

TORRIJOS HAS ALWAYS BEEN SUSPICIOUS OF THE NEGOTIATING PROCESS AND HE IS RELUCTANT TO DELEGATE AUTHORITY ON ISSUES THAT MIGHT AFFECT HIS POWER POSITION. HE BELIEVES IN PERSONAL DIPLOMACY AND IS PERSUADED THAT IF MEN AT THE TOP DESIRE A SETTLEMENT AN AGREEMENT CAN BE FRAMED IN RATHER SHORT ORDER, WITH TECHNICIANS LATER WORKING OUT WHAT HE CONSIDERS "MERE DETAILS."

FROM JULY 1971 THROUGH MARCH 1972 TORRIJOS KEPT HIS NEGOTIATING TEAM ON A TIGHT LEASH. NEGOTIATIONS WERE HALTED IN MARCH AS PANAMA ATTEMPTED TO REFINE ITS POSITION. THE PANAMANIAN NEGOTIATORS, THE FOREIGN RELATIONS ADVISORY COMMISSION, AND THE FOREIGN MINISTRY FINALLY DEVELOPED A POSITION WHICH THE PANAMANIAN NEGOTIATORS DESCRIBED AS THE FIRST "REASONABLE" WORKING PAPER. THE PAPER NEEDED TORRIJOS' APPROVAL, BUT HE WAS INVOLVED IN DOMESTIC MATTERS AND WAS UNWILLING TO FOCUS ON THE CANAL ISSUE.

OVER THE PAST FEW MONTHS TORRIJOS HAS SOUGHT TO DEVELOP A POSITION OF STRENGTH FROM WHICH TO NEGOTIATE. TO THIS END HE IS TRYING TO HAVE THE UN SECURITY COUNCIL MEET IN PANAMA IN MARCH, HE HAS SAID HE WILL NOT ACCEPT US CANAL PAYMENTS, AND HE HAS HAD PANAMANIAN AMBASSADORS AROUND THE WORLD PUBLICIZE PANAMA'S SIDE ON THE CANAL ZONE ISSUE.

TORRIJOS UNDOUBTEDLY FEELS IT POLITICALLY NECESSARY TO GAIN JURISDICTIONAL CONTROL OVER THE CANAL ZONE. BEYOND THAT, HE WOULD PROBABLY ACCEPT THE BEST DEAL HE COULD GET FROM THE US. SHORT OF

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PROVOKING A CRISIS, HE PROBABLY FEELS THAT A MEETING WITH TOP US OFFICIALS IS THE ONLY WAY HE CAN BE SURE OF THE LIMITS OF THE US POSITION. SUCH A MEETING, MOREOVER, WOULD INCREASE TORRIJOS' PRESTIGE AND HELP HIM SELL AN AGREEMENT DOMESTICALLY. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

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